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Un-Ford-gettable year at city hall
PAGE 6

Going undercover to get the story
PAGE 3

Tinseltown's top tabloid shockers
PAGE 31

2013: World-class wreck

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Local Crazy things happen every year in this city — though we can't help but feel 2013 was the year Toronto went world-class weird.

Lying to find the truth

JESSICA SMITH CROSS
Metro reporter

As part of my job as a Metro reporter, I work undercover.

I've been asked if it's scary and what it's like to pretend to be someone I'm not. For me, it's a thrill. I love being on the trail of a good story.

Metro sends me undercover to do stories when someone doesn't want it told and a little deception is required to find the truth. Two come to mind:

I am unemployed, with no skills, in need of a fixer

Earlier this year, a reader emailed Metro to complain that a family member had been duped by a company called You Find Work. It's a career-counselling company that gives people who are desperate for jobs a hard sell and then charges them thousands of dollars for services they can get elsewhere for free, right when they can least afford it.

I needed to see how it works — and prove it was a scam.

I created a fake resumé and posed as a job seeker. When the manager of You Find Work wanted my fiancé to come to a second meeting, I brought a colleague — one of Metro's web editors. Afterwards, we revealed ourselves as reporters and interviewed him.

Then I wrote a story based on what I learned and the stories of several former clients. Months later, I still get emails from people who read it and decided to steer clear of You Find Work.

I am lovestruck, lonely, in need of psychic assistance

Another investigation came from a reader who said he was conned out of $14,000 by a psychic who kept promising to make his love come back to him, with no result. That would be fraud, but I needed to prove it.

I walked into a messy apartment while my editor — serving as my "muscle" — waited outside, phone in hand, ready to call the police. I told the psychic that I too was looking for a boyfriend who left me. After a palm and tarot-card reading, he gave me different price points for returning my fake boyfriend to me: for $1,500 he'd love me forever, for $1,200 he'd come back to stay for four years and for $900 he'd stay only two.

When I told them I was a journalist — over the phone, from the safety of my office — the assistant gave me a lot of denials. He knew nothing, about anything.

By going to the psychic myself, I was able to help prove that the sad story the reader told me was true. After the story was published, he found the courage to go to the police.

At Metro, our disguises are a little more convincing than this, but you have to admit that the trench coat is pretty evocative. DAVID VAN DYKE/METRO

Fake Ford. The most famous bod in Toronto

It's the role of a lifetime — a rich, layered character with humour and pathos — and he's perfect for it.

The local actor who posed as Mayor Rob Ford's body double for our front cover has made a small side-career portraying the mayor — sometimes just his body and sometimes the whole man. He'd love to play him in a movie one day.

"It could be an epic movie or a movie of a week, a whole series — comedy, dramatic, all of it," he says.

But, for now, he doesn't want his name used or associated with the political storm that surrounds Ford. He's worried about jeopardizing his commercial work.

"He's become a weird global phenomenon, and I think it goes back to seeing a fat man being silly," he says. "Our society's primed to think the fat man's funny, and, my god, he's not breaking down that barrier on any level."

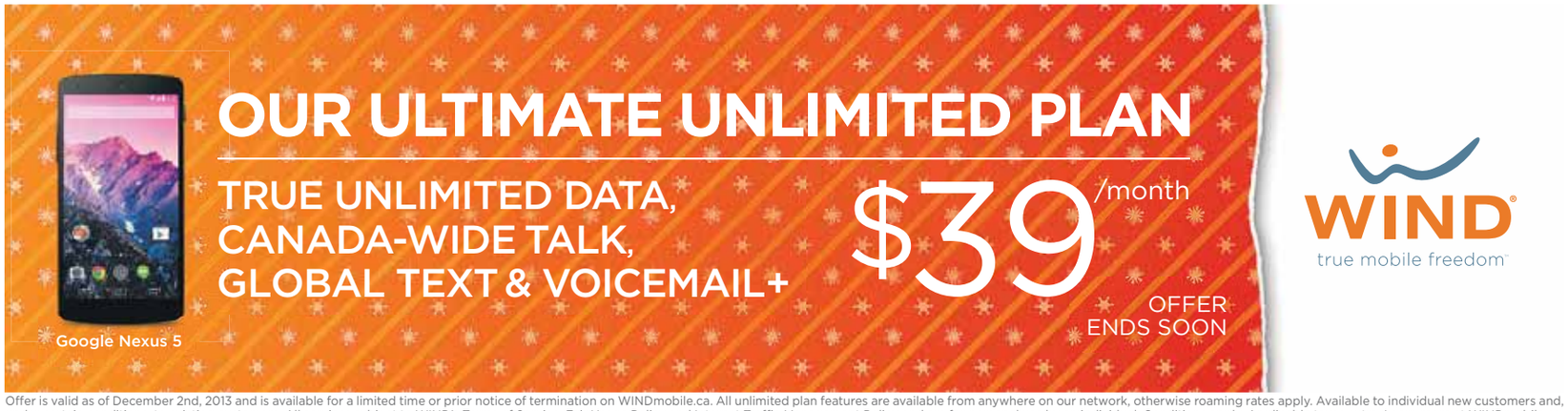
He started playing the mayor in a comedy sketch, and soon afterwards was recruited to be a go-go-dancing Ford at a Peaches concert.

He was also Ford's body on the cover of Now Magazine — no, not the nearly naked cover, the recent one where the mayor is giving two middle fingers.

Playing Ford is not particularly lucrative, but it is pleasurable work.

"Until he leaves the scene, I will profit from his foolishness," he said.

JESSICA SMITH CROSS/METRO



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Readers' online choices

2013 was an emotional year — you told us you wept, you raged and you burst with pride.

Saddest

Toddler dies in hot car in Milton, Ont.

If it wasn't clear before, this past summer taught everyone the danger of leaving a child alone in the heat.

Maximus Huyskens was just one victim, perishing on June 26 — a month before his second birthday.

He was forgotten for hours by his deaf grandmother — who thought she had already dropped him off at daycare — as thermometers reached 30 C.

The grandmother was, by all accounts, devastated. She pleaded guilty to failing to provide the necessities of life.

FACEBOOK

Saddest

Sammy Yatim gunned down on streetcar

The extreme force used to subdue 18-year-old Sammy Yatim shocked and puzzled the nation, especially because everyone could go to YouTube and hear the nine gunshots for themselves.

Other reports suggested six of the shots (and the Taser) were fired after a long pause and with the teen already crumpled on the ground.

Toronto police Const. James Forcillo has been charged with second-degree murder in the case.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Frothiest

Yes, Rob Ford smoked crack

...probably during one of his drunken stupors. Really, could people have chosen anything else?

After months of denial, deflection and finger pointing, it finally came to light that the crack video did indeed exist and that it was in the hands of police. Then the allegations increased in number and credibility with the release of explosive court documents.

What followed? Months of slightly amended denial, deflection and finger pointing.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Frothiest

Rob Ford is not a ladies' man

Whether you believe the rumours of lecherous behaviour contained in police documents — that he told a female security guard he was "going to eat her box," that he harassed his former policy advisor, that he cavorts with prostitutes — or that he groped former mayoral candidate Sarah Thomson, as she alleges, there are some things we know for sure: Ford is confident that "women love money" for Christmas and that he has more than enough to eat at home.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Proudest

Leukemia patient finds donor after 'swabbing party'

It's not easy to convince a pub to go dry, even for a day, but beating leukemia is a pretty compelling reason.

Toronto pub Grace O'Malley's handed out swabs instead of beers to try to find a compatible stem-cell donor for former general manager Chris Taylor.

A potential match has since been found, although it's not clear whether Taylor's "hero" signed up through the party or not.

JESSICA SMITH CROSS/METRO FILE

Proudest

Cheery chalk man has neighbours gawking, flocking

Plenty of would-be net celebrities flog out one funny, inspiring tweet after another, but few achieve what one Toronto resident has with a simple chalkboard.

After moving into Cedarvale in April, Ayden Byle began scrawling messages and placing them in his front window daily.

One message, "Need: chalk, wife. SOON," brought both chalk and love letters. An invite to his housewarming party drew nearly 100 guests.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Rob Ford, life of the party, dominated stories about city hall in 2013 at the expense of stories about things that actually might make life in this city better. ALL PHOTOS: TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE

Mayoral mad-libs: Covering city hall in the Rob Ford era

URBAN COMPASS

Matt Elliott
toronto@metronews.ca

These days, whenever I tell anyone that I make my living writing about Toronto City Hall and our famous mayor, I tend to get the same response.

"Oh," they say, with a knowing smile, "you must be having fun."

And, yeah, I get it. With Mayor Rob Ford, crazy stuff happens. The city hall beat used to be dominated by stories about whether property taxes should go up by one per cent or a half of one per cent, or whether the city should license backyard chickens. But now it's like an HBO drama. Drug use! Police investigations! Lawsuits! Inadvertent football tackles on the council floor!

It's definitely not boring.

But I wouldn't say that it's necessarily fun. Covering Ford over the last year has been challenging. There are moments where it's a total adrenaline rush. It's hard to forget those times I spent counting down the minutes until the release of police documents, or the frenzied speculation that comes with every delayed mayoral press conference.

But it's also been tiring. There have been times — especially lately — where a major Ford scandal breaks and I groan. It means another week where stories about other city hall issues fall to the wayside.

More than anything else, I think a lot of media members have experienced a major case of Ford fatigue. He creates piles of news, but there isn't much variety to it.

In my role as a columnist and blogger, sometimes it feels like I could almost take a fill-in-the-blanks approach to writing about the mayor. It's mayoral mad-libs: Mayor Rob Ford did [something scandalous] today. It was wrong for [reasons]. The mayor must do [something that won't matter, because all this will just happen again].

But to ignore the mayor would be to ignore the important job he still has, and in a sense it'd be letting him off the hook. To just let the mayor do outrageous things or say things that aren't true without calling him on it would be a failure on my part.

But I also feel like I've failed when I let the Ford frenzy distract me from other city hall stories. And there are so many important stories. Stories about underfunded student-nutrition programs, miles-long waitlists for affordable childcare, our ongoing housing crisis, the need for electoral reform, and a hundred others.

There's a necessary balance there — one I'm still trying to find — between stories about Rob Ford and stories about things that actually might make life in this city better.

That separation shouldn't exist. Stories about the mayor should be stories about issues that matter. That they so often aren't at Rob Ford's city hall is the thing that takes the fun out of it — the thing that makes this hard.

Read more of Matt's blog, Ford for Toronto, at metronews.ca

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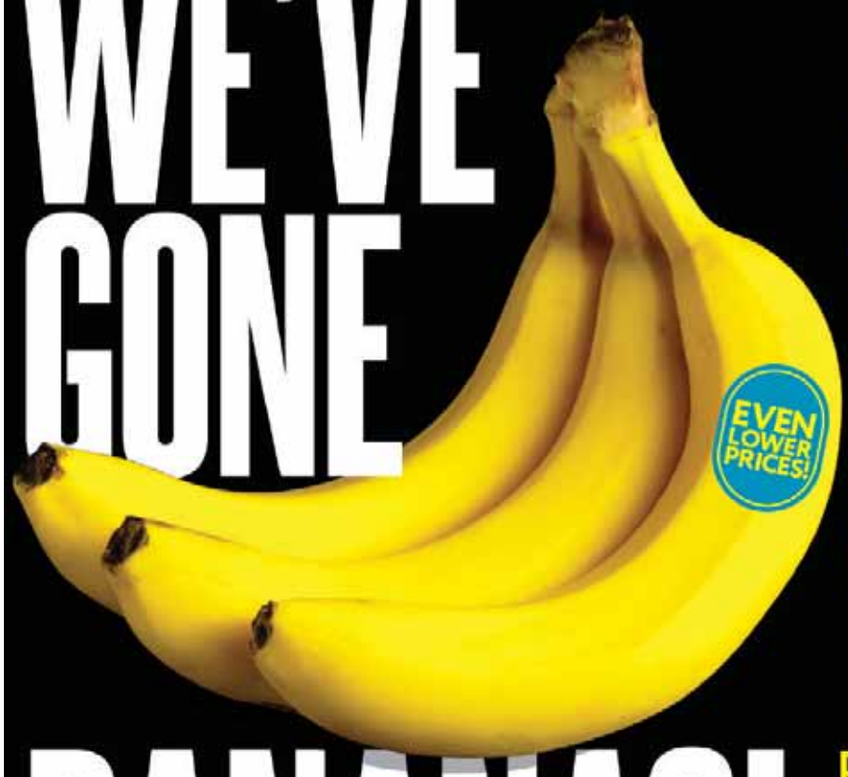

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Where was outrage for teenage girls forced into prostitution?

Group homes.
Runaways, at the tender age of 14 and 15, were failed by the system

JESSICA SMITH CROSS
Metro reporter

Three girls ran away from a group home last year. Two, then aged 14 and 15, were made to be prostitutes and the third, aged 16, was charged with human trafficking alongside a group of older men.

That story, more than any I've covered, left a lasting impact on me.

The girls were minors in the care of the province when they were trafficked. They were in a place that was supposed to be secure. Its purpose is to help adolescent girls who have already experienced trauma. It was supposed to help them grow up safely, but they ended up in the care of pimps.

I don't know what went wrong at that group home because no one has ever answered that question. For a year, all I could get from the Ministry of Child and Youth Services was that they were waiting for the police investigation to be over.

I called up the appropriate critics of both opposition parties ready to give them a platform to say that the government failed these kids and someone must be held responsible. Neither jumped at the opportunity. Neither knew much about the situation or offered anything but general concern.

I reported on every development in that story. All the major news outlets covered the press conference the Toronto Police Service held to announce the arrests. But to me, something has always been missing. Where was the outrage?

The government needs to do more to help girls and young women preyed on by pimps who "find a vulnerable situation and exploit it." DITA ALANGKARA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

In October, the case ended. Two of the men pleaded guilty to prostitution charges and the other charges, included the charges against the 16-year-old girl, were dropped.

The ministry finally told me they were "enhancing safety measures, improving staff training and reducing the number of youth residents under the (group home's) licence to improve the overall quality and security in the home."

Is that it?

In the meantime, I learned that recruiting girls from group homes for prostitution isn't new.

There a was a successful criminal case against a pimp who targeted girls from an Ontario group home in 2009. The victim testified her pimp convinced her to run away and work for him by telling her that other girls in her group home had done it too.

The investigator of the recent case, Det. Mark Benallick, said at that press conference that group homes are concerning for police because there are so many of them and they're home to vulnerable people.

"They (human traffickers) prey on vulnerable people," he said. "It's very much a predator relationship — they find a vulnerable situation and they exploit it."

I talked to Bridget Perrier, who was prostituted from her group home at age 12, 25 years ago. Then, it was common, she said. And she doesn't know if anything has changed. She is calling on the provincial government to acquire "a deep understanding" of human trafficking and prostitution and how the sex trade involves vulnerable girls in the child welfare system.

I agree. I'd also like to see a little outrage and hear some promises about how it will never be allowed to happen.

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National

Rob Ford, Senate scandal, Toilet Squirrel ... the stories that inspired us, amused us and made us think twice.

Metro's choice

Starman blows our minds

HENRIETTA WALMARK
Metro copy editor

Commander's log — stardate: 04-12-2013: "Here am I floating in my tin can/A last glimpse of the world/Planet Earth is blue and there's nothing left to do."

Few events in 2013 eclipsed Chris Hadfield's cover of David Bowie's Space Oddity. The video of the astronaut literally floating in his "tin can" as he sang his farewell to life aboard the International Space Station capped an extraordinary mission of firsts.

As the ISS orbited Earth, he tweeted stunning photos of the planet, chatted with William Shatner, shared videos of zero-gravity science experiments, did Q&A's with kids via satellite-links and performed an interspace duet with Ed Robertson.

Hadfield was having the time of his life, and took us along for the ride.

But what's really cool is what's been left trailing in the stardust. Hadfield allowed me and millions of others to experience the universe as never before, sparking our imagination and reigniting interest in the final frontier as a space worth exploring.

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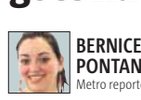
Toilet Squirrel. 'Peg newsroom goes nuts over soggy rodent



BERNICE PONTANILLA
Metro reporter

It was the summer story that had Winnipeggers — and likely others all over North America — looking warily at their toilets.

And it led to 15 minutes of fame for a St. James, Man. woman, all thanks to a little critter that somehow ended up in her toilet wet, scared and clinging for dear life.

Angela Campbell said it was her love of making people laugh that spurred her to contact Metro Winnipeg only hours after her encounter with and rescue of the now infamous Toilet Squirrel.

"Out of all of the toilets it could have climbed out of, I'm glad it was mine and that I could help it," said Campbell in a December interview with Metro.

Once Metro Winnipeg broke the story online, Campbell was inundated with requests for interviews from local, national and international media outlets.

Readers' online selections

Here's what the Metropolitan Panel picked as their favourite online national news stories of the year

UFO sightings double in Canada

Ufology Research issued its Canadian UFO survey in May and the stats revealed reported sightings doubled in 2012.

"Polls have shown that one in 10 Canadians believe they have seen a UFO. That's three to four million people with UFO experiences," said Chris Rutkowski of Ufology.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

U of T 'sex party' proceeds

After a "slightly overwhelming" few days of publicity in early 2013, the University of Toronto Sexual Education Centre decided to go ahead with its "Sexy Social" at Oasis Aqua Lounge, a club that bills itself as a water-themed adult playground. The event, organized for its sexual awareness week, was dubbed an "epic student sex club adventure" by organizers — and labelled as an orgy on a Reddit post. The group's co-ordinator, Dylan Tower, said the party was just a safe introduction to Toronto's sex-club scene. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Brazeau gets flack for rude remarks

In early 2013, some Idle No More organizers wanted repercussions for now-suspended senator Patrick Brazeau after he made comments about Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence. Brazeau referred to Spence's "so-called hunger strike." "I was sick two weeks ago," Brazeau said. "I had the flu and I lost five pounds. I look at Miss Spence, when she started her hunger strike, and now?" Brazeau said as a voice in the hall called out, "She's fatter." METRO

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Metro story helps man find a new home

KATE WEBB
Metro reporter

JENNIFER GAUTHIER/METRO IN VANCOUVER

'Hundred times better'

When asked to update a story that impacted me over the last year, I immediately thought of Stephen Chalmers. I interviewed him again last month.

The walkway up to his new trailer sparkles with Christmas lights, and on clear nights moonlight spills through pine trees onto the quiet campground where he has lived for nearly two months now.

The 54-year-old is still getting used to his new surroundings after moving out of a dilapidated trailer at the run-down Beladean Trailer Park in Surrey, B.C., which lost power in September due to an improperly supervised motel demolition.

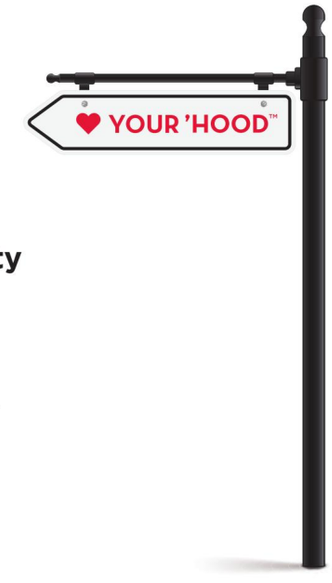
"I'm 100 times better. I feel better, I sleep better," says Chalmers, who suffers from multiple mental illnesses and lives on a meagre disability income.

New digs, old issues

After Metro ran stories on the outage, and the fact that he couldn't find a new park willing to take his old, leaky trailer, an online campaign raised enough to buy him a newer, 1999 fifth-wheel.

But the complex problems of a man who has overcome crack addiction and alcoholism and still struggles daily with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder cannot be neatly resolved with four walls of aluminum and vinyl. Some days he feels up, some days down, he says. The weather, getting used to his new neighbours, and the stress of living low-income — all of these have an effect on his moods. But Chalmers says he seeks help when he needs it, from the mental-health care system, from friends, and from a local food bank.

Rewards. Just around the corner.



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For the latest information, visit us at chevrolet.ca, drop by your local Chevrolet Dealer or call us at 1-800-GM-DRIVE. ▼Based on a 60/48/48/48/36 month lease for 2014 Chevrolet (Cruze LS 1SA/Trax LS FWD 1SA/Equinox LS FWD 1LS/Traverse LS FWD 1LS/Silverado 1500 Crew Cab 4WD 1WT+G80+B30). Annual kilometre limit of 20,000 km, $0.16 per excess kilometre. OAC by GM Financial. Monthly/Bi-Weekly payments may vary depending on down payment/trade. A down payment or trade of $0 and/or $0 security deposit is required. Total obligation is $10,850/$13,446/$16,577/$20,737/$14,772. Option to purchase at lease end is $6,686/$7,915/$11,198/$15,748/$20,304. Excess wear and tear and km charges not included. Other lease options available. ♦$3,500 is a manufacturer to dealer delivery credit (tax exclusive) for 2014 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Ext. & Crew Cab and is reflected in offers in this advertisement. Other cash credits available on most models. See dealer for details. ▼/♦/***Freight & PDI ($1,600/$1,600/$1,600/$1,600/$1,650), registration, air and tire levies and OMVIC fees included. Insurance, licence, PPSA, dealer fees and applicable taxes not included. Offers apply as indicated to 2014 new or demonstrator models of the vehicle equipped as described. Offers apply to qualified retail customers in the Ontario Chevrolet Dealer Marketing Association area only (including Outaouais). Dealers are free to set individual prices. Quantities limited; dealer order or trade may be required. Limited time offers which may not be combined with other offers. GMCL may modify, extend or terminate offers in whole or in part at any time without notice. Conditions and limitations apply. See dealer for details. +Based on WardsAuto.com 2012 Upper Small segment, excluding Hybrid and Diesel powertrains. Standard 10 airbags, ABS, traction control and StabiliTrak®. ®Bluetooth is a registered trademark of Bluetooth SIG Inc. ♣Comparison based on 2013 Polk segmentation: Compact SUV and latest competitive data available and based on the maximum legroom available. Excludes other GM brands. Δ2014 Silverado 1500 with the available 5.3L EcoTec3 V8 engine equipped with a 6-speed automatic transmission has a fuel consumption rating of 13.0L/100 km city, 8.7L/100 km highway and 11.0L/100 km combined 2WD and 13.3L/100 km city, 9.0L/100 km highway and 11.4L/100/km combined 4WD. Ford F-150 with the 3.5L EcoBoost V6 engine has a fuel consumption rating of 12.9L/100 km city, 9.0L/100 km highway and 11.1L/100 km combined 2WD and 14.1L/100 km city, 9.6L/100 km highway and 12.1L/100 km combined 4WD. Fuel consumption based on GM Testing in accordance with approved Transport Canada test methods. Your actual fuel consumption may vary. Comparison based on wardsauto.com 2013 Large Pickup segment and latest competitive data available. Excludes other GM vehicles. ♣When equipped with available 6.2L EcoTec3 V8 engine (available to order fall 2013). Class is Light-Duty Full-Size Pickups. ◇◇Requires 2WD Double or Crew Cab with available 6.2L EcoTec3 V8 engine and Max Trailering Package. Maximum trailer weight ratios are calculated assuming a base vehicle, except for any option(s) necessary to achieve the rating, plus driver. The weight of other optional equipment, passengers and cargo will reduce the maximum trailer weight your vehicle can tow. Comparison based on wardsauto.com 2013 Light-Duty Large Pickup segment and latest competitive data available. Excludes other GM vehicles. Class is Light-Duty Full-Size Pickups. ◊U.S. government 5-Star Safety Ratings are part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA's) New Car Assessment Program (safercar.gov). ††2014 Cruze LTZ, MSRP with freight, PDI & levies $28,489. 2014 Trax LTZ FWD, MSRP with freight, PDI & levies $30,089. 2014 Equinox LTZ FWD, MSRP with freight, PDI & levies $37,539. 2014 Traverse LTZ FWD, MSRP with freight, PDI & levies $48,289. 2014 Silverado 1500 LTZ Crew Cab 4WD, MSRP $51,379. Dealers are free to set individual prices. †Offer valid only to eligible retail lessees in Canada who have obtained credit approval by GM Financial, have entered into a lease agreement with GM Financial, and who accept delivery from October 1, 2013 through January 2, 2014 of a new eligible 2014 model. General Motors of Canada will pay the first month's lease payment (inclusive of taxes and any applicable pro-rata amount normally due at lease delivery as defined on the lease agreement). 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City's roads became rivers

ROBSON FLETCHER
Metro reporter

Standing at a downtown street corner, thigh-deep in brown water, I snapped one of my favourite photos of the Calgary flood. A man was trudging through the road-turned-river, with the flood-ravaged Saddledome in the background behind him. The image, to me, summed up just how far Calgary's rivers had encroached into the heart of the city. Then I realized I had better get the heck out of there.

Empathy

Bosma murder not just 'a story'

STEPHEN BALDWIN
Copy editor

The disappearance and murder of Tim Bosma was for me a reminder that we're all susceptible to becoming front-page stories. The 32-year-old Ancaster, Ont., man vanished after taking two men for a test drive in a truck he was selling.

The news that typically makes it to Metro's pages can often be devastating enough to elicit our sympathy, but rarely our empathy. As hard as we try, it's not easy to imagine ourselves in war-torn cities.

Anyone who has had to trust a stranger can relate to Bosma's situation. This was a heartbreaking loss for a young family, and my hope is that it forces people to view these stories not just as news, but as personal experiences.

Gentlemen, start your engines.

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Digital

Metro's digital team takes a look back at the stories we are all still talking about.

The lighter side of the law. A dash of humour helps humanize VicPD

LUKE SIMCOE
Metro digital reporter

On the Metro digital desk, we're well aware that funny stories are more likely to be shared by our online readers; it's an insight we share with the Victoria Police Department.

Last year, when a naive Reddit user posted about buying marijuana at the University of Victoria, VicPD Const. Mike Russell was there.

Using the "VicPDCanada" handle, Russell announced himself with a simple "cough," reminding users that the long arm of the law extends online.

Since then, he and his partner Bowen Osoko have been working to build the force's social media cred.

And despite the serious nature of police work, the pair hasn't shied away from the absurdist humour endemic to Internet culture.

When cops busted drug dealers hiding cocaine in fake "Durasell" batteries in January, Russell penned a hilarious press release and offered tips to others looking to secure their stash.

"Don't forget to label it 'not drugs' so we don't inadvertently look inside," he said.

When handed the reins of the force's Twitter account in March, Osoko opted to spam followers with pictures of cats wearing hats.

"Being silly sometimes helps humanize our officers and make them more approachable. It's also just a lot of fun."

The Victoria Police Department has spammed Twitter followers with pictures of cats wearing hats, among other humorous tactics.
COURTESY VICPD

Cats with hats

"Being silly sometimes helps humanize our officers and make them more approachable. It's also just a lot of fun."
Bowen Osoko, Victoria Police Department

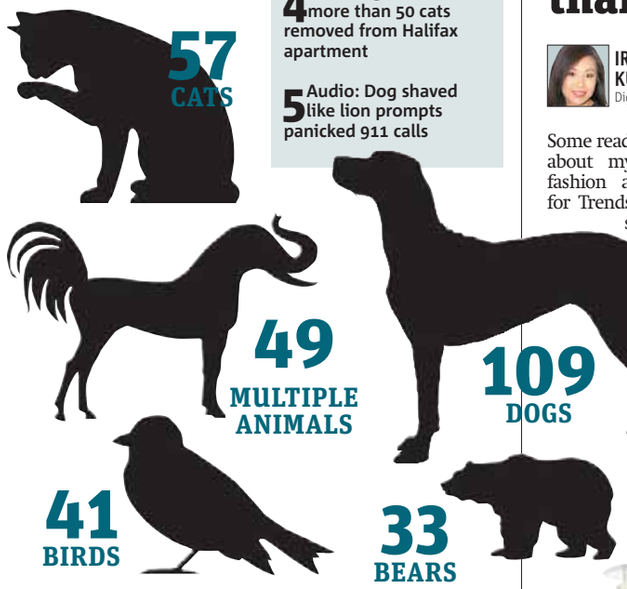
Which animal is top dog?

COLIN MCNEIL
Metro web editor

Animals. They're cute, they're cuddly, and they have a furry iron grip on the Internet. From the continuing antics of the Ikea monkey to the Toronto Zoo's pandas, it's been quite a year for Canadian fauna, but which four-legged friend is top dog at metronews.ca? The answer may give you paws for thought. There have been 539 stories on metronews.ca tagged "animals" in 2013. Here are the top 5 animals (by number of stories).

Top stories by views

1. Photos: Regina squirrels tangled by sticky situation
2. Warning: Graphic new images surface of GuZoo animal farm
3. Video: Elephant seal inhales meal in blink of an eye
4. Hoarding case sees more than 50 cats removed from Halifax apartment
5. Audio: Dog shaved like lion prompts panicked 911 calls



Irene Kuan's "sparrow face" selfies. CONTRIBUTED

Glymm. There's more to being a beauty editor than sparrow-face selfies

IRENE KUAN
Digital associate managing editor

Some readers have complained about my work as Metro's fashion and beauty blogger for Trends Report, labelling it sexist and shallow.

Granted, writing about "sparrow face selfies" and "bitchy resting face" doesn't suggest hard journalism, but the beauty industry is what it is.

In fact, if it hadn't been for an assignment reviewing beauty boxes, I would have never stumbled upon this story: One reader claimed she had been scammed by a subscription beauty box service called Glymm. The company charged her for a yearly subscription and then sent an abrupt email about their closure. It shuttered its business, website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, while keeping customers' money.

As a blogger, I care about my readers and their feedback.

I tracked the founder of Glymm using LinkedIn and badgered his secretary for information over the phone. I also used my ties as a beauty blogger to get reaction from other beauty-box businesses. After all, there were tons of irked Glymm subscribers in an industry that is still working to establish itself.

The week of April 25 the Glymm story generated more than 10,000 website views and 20,000-plus views on my Storify. It even prompted a company, Nail Polish Canada, to link to my story and provide free gifts to customers bilked by Glymm.

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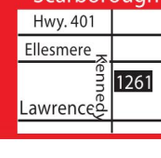

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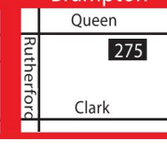

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International

2013 reminded us the world is an uncertain place.

Egypt

'An uncertain reality'

DEENA DOUARA
Metro copy editor

An Egyptian woman reacts in Tahrir Square the day after former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, the country's first democratically elected president, was ousted from power on July 4 in Cairo.
ED GILES/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Calls to my relatives in Egypt are reminders that while the deteriorating state of affairs — of people's spirits and dreams and savings — is frustrating to behold from here, it's an uncertain reality, a nightmare, over there.

I was there this summer, in the leadup to the anniversary of then-president Mohammed Morsi's inauguration. I tried to understand the arguments: why Egyptians must protest; call for legal processes; stay home and give him a fair chance. I tried to capture that atmosphere for Metro, on TV and for the Huffington Post, all garnering strong reactions. As protests intensified, so did people's rhetoric. A prevalent "You're with us or with the terrorists" approach took root, serving to justify military crackdowns and delegitimize nuanced opinions that didn't conform neatly to "pro-military" or "pro-Muslim Brotherhood."

The 2011 revolution was one of the most dramatic scenes Egyptians witnessed in at least three decades. There was uncertainty and disagreement and plenty of anger. But I believe it is 2013 that really changed Egyptians. Mistrust, contempt, revenge, hatred — these sentiments are relatively new, and they are frightening.

As repression, imprisonment and censorship have seemingly increased alongside an ever-declining economy, Egyptians now must fear their neighbours, too. And divided, they say, is how they fall.

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Readers' online selections

Nothing hard-hitting here: Metro online readers gravitated toward the sublime and the ridiculous. Here are their five favourite international stories of 2013.

Man fired after wrestling sharks

A 62-year-old British man who became an Internet sensation after wrestling with a shark on an Australian beach said in March that he was fired after his employer discovered he'd been abroad while on sick leave. Paul Marshallsea was filmed yanking a six-foot-long shark away from waders at Caloundra beach in January. But his intervention also caught the eye of his employer. Marshallsea had been on leave since last April and said his doctor advised him to go on vacation. **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Having same name apparently not the secret to a successful marriage

It took a simple Facebook message from one Kelly Hildebrandt to another Kelly Hildebrandt to get the wheels of love turning. But it seems the two are no longer Facebook friends. The young couple filed for divorce in July. "How do they term it at the courthouse? Irreconcilable differences, that is what I would say," the male Hildebrandt told a news station. "We gave it our best shot." **TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE**

Dog shaved like lion prompts 911 call

A dog that has been shaved to look like a lion set off a panic in Norfolk, Va. in January. Three 911 calls came in on the same day reporting a lion wandering the streets. It's "roaming loose in the neighbourhood a few blocks from the zoo," one caller reported to the 911 dispatcher at 10:19 a.m. After the 911 calls, Norfolk police called the Virginia Zoo to make sure its lions were all accounted for. **TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE**

MSN Messenger goes the way of ICQ

Microsoft's venerable Messenger program was moved to the great big recycling bin in the sky this year.
Users had until March 15 to migrate their accounts over to Skype, which the software company acquired in 2011.
At its peak, Messenger boasted 300 million users in more than 60 countries.
Microsoft will continue Messenger in China, due to the peculiar nature of the Chinese market. **METRO**

Dog with human-like face gets hundreds of adoption offers

Tonik the dog became an international sensation when a photo of him was picked up by media around the globe. "His pictures have been up on the adoption site since September 2011," said Jen Schwartz, the founder and owner of the Homeward Bound animal shelter. "For some reason, someone decided this week that he looks like a human and it's been overwhelming since," said Schwartz at the time of the buzz. **TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE**

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#omg! Readers all a-Twitter over TEMP

Canadian author Douglas Coupland, best-known for his groundbreaking novel Generation X, visited Metro's head office just before the launch of TEMP. The 20-part fiction series was published in Metro throughout November. Here's how Metro readers responded on Twitter:

@jason_michael: A sincere heartfelt Thank You to @DouglasCoupland for TEMP. I am a temp working for the government and your words continue to inspire!

@Teyemtenot: yet another reason why Metro is my favourite thing to read in the morning!

@hurricanediana: thanks for keeping me entertained for 20 a.m. commutes. Funny, surprisingly thought-provoking and relevant.

@KaT4_2012: read TEMP every day! #youguysnailedit #precariousworkiseverywhere Douglas Coupland is brilliant

@morgancadenhead: The collaboration between @DouglasCoupland and @MetroNewsCanada is fascinating. A truly unique way to approach fiction.

@SuzanneMaryse: i am loving this! ... Coupland nails the post-modern condition once again

@ctmwyn: The best part about @DouglasCoupland #Temp is the high concentration of #CliffHangers #Serialization

METRO

Web editor Hannah Zitner chats with Douglas Coupland during the author's visit to Metro's head office in Toronto on Oct. 28. DAVID VAN DYKE/METRO

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Voices This is rare. Three Metro columnists are asked to write about their most memorable work this year. Turns out it can't be done without your feedback.

MY ONE LONG YEAR

JUST SAYIN'

Paul Sullivan
metronews.ca

Even though asking me to choose a favourite column is like asking me to proclaim a public preference for my goldfish over my hamster, I have dutifully reviewed Just Sayin' for the past year, and it turns out I have a lot to say, which might surprise a few people.

But I've managed to narrow it down.

Generally, I try to communicate my total bemusement with contemporary life. It's the best of times. It's the worst of times. It's the weirdest of times, right?

That makes for lots of material, such as:

CONTRIBUTED

Multi-billionaire Amazon's Jeff Bezos was in the news this year for buying the fabled Washington Post of Woodward and Bernstein fame for the equivalent of billionaire pocket lint: $250 million.

That's less, by the way, than what the Qatar Royal family paid for Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne's The Card Players — $259 million.

(Big deal. I paid $2.59 for The Card Players at the neighbourhood garage sale. I really love the look on the bulldog's face.)

ISTOCK IMAGES

Then there are those columns that are memorable for some really great bits, such as the one about the one-way expedition to Mars that was signing up potential colonists earlier this year:

"Therefore Mars One is looking for a special kind of person. Someone who is nuts enough to spend the rest of his or her life stuck in a climate-controlled hut the size of a portable toilet but well adjusted enough not to try to eat his or her fellow castaways."

What writing!

Of course, you can't write a column these days without having your own online anvil chorus, and I managed to hit a sour note writing about people who don't wear enough clothes on the beach. My protest went along aesthetic lines, not skin care, and the mob that formed outside my virtual door was not happy.

Here's just a taste: "Holy crap this is arguably the most ignorant thing I've ever read in my life."

You can't please all of the people all of the time, but if you try really hard, you can annoy all of the people all of the time.

Fortunately, I did manage to get an online standing O for a column I wrote about a movement to ban tipping that's just getting off the ground in New York and Chicago. One reader, named Crystal, gave me some unordinary positive feedback: "I don't usually write in to comment on articles of any sort, but after reading your brief article I had to say, very well written, entertaining, all the while thought-provoking. Excellent!"

Thanks, Crystal, I needed that. As you can tell, it's been a long year.

Reader writes

"After reading your brief article I had to say, very well written, entertaining, all the while thought-provoking." Crystal

2013 is over and I'm left holding the (mail)bag

HE SAYS

John Mazerolle
readers@metronews.ca

ISTOCK IMAGES

I've been told to pick one favourite 2013 column and reminisce, but my columns are like my children and once they're out in the world I will deny they are mine.

Instead, let's open the mailbag. After a year of columnastic genius I feel it's important for readers to provide a fresh perspective on how wonderful I am. For instance, one fan recently sent me a Facebook message that said my columns are "desperately TRYING to be funny. Alas, they just come off juvenile." To hear my work is desperately funny, yet childlike, is wonderful. I clicked on her page to thank her and learned she's graduated from "I didn't finish (2008)," which signals a level of brash independence and attention to detail I think we can all emulate. Under professional skills it said, "crack-smoking," which means she will soon be a writer (if she's joking) or the mayor of a large city (if she's not).

Mail moment

"Stupid yellow journalism at it's finest!!!" Online Fan

Another reader let me know my column is "pure dribble." I briefly assumed it was an insult and he had misspelled 'drivel.' Then I realized it was a basketball-related compliment, and that he considers me the Michael Jordan of Metro columnists. Pure, unadulterated dribble. Swish.

Some other actual mailbag highlights: * "Hypocrit much?" (More than you. I add an 'e.') * "Do your research." (No.) * "Stupid yellow journalism at it's finest!!!" (There are numerous problems here, but they are amply overcome by the use of three exclamation points. Bravo.) And that's the 2013 mailbag. See you next year, readers — older, but not wiser!!!

I swear, and I am a girl

SHE SAYS

Jessica Napier
@MetroSheSays

As 2013 comes to a close, it's fun to look back at some of the memorable columns I've written over the course of the year. Back in June, I wrote a piece about swearing in public. I described how my boyfriend and I had been reprimanded by an overbearing parent at a neighbouring table after dropping a few expletives during a Sunday brunch.

From the inbox

"I am saddened when I hear a young person, especially a young girl, making a public reference to parts of their body and their knowledge of sexual activity with obscenities."
Anonymous reader

I was hardly advocating for an uncivilized society full of foul-mouthed brutes, but the column definitely struck a nerve among our readers.

I received a few letters from people who identified swearing in public as a generational problem. One gentleman wrote an email stating, "I am saddened when I hear a young person, especially a young girl, making a public reference to parts of their body and their knowledge of sexual activity with obscenities."

I understand the importance of good manners, but I take offence to this notion that I should suppress any behaviour that is deemed 'unladylike' according to a 1950s standard.

ISTOCK IMAGES

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The good, the bad and the ugly

We watched 'em all. The movies we loved, the movies we didn't, and the movies that fell somewhere in between

NED EHRBAR
Metro World News in Hollywood

It's time to bid farewell to 2013 with a look at the most disappointing films of the year.

Pacific Rim
Giant robots! Fighting giant sea monsters! Directed by Guillermo del Toro! This could've been so good, and obviously we thought it would be, but the results were just… not so much.

Only God Forgives
Maybe Nicholas Winding Refn was punishing people for liking his fantastic "Drive" too much, but this art-house meditation on masculinity, violence and retribution — we think? — was just a slog.

Star Trek Into Darkness
We might have been less disappointed in this long-awaited sequel if J.J. Abrams had just come out and said from the get-go that Benedict Cumberbatch was playing Khan. If only that were the only problem with it, though.

Jack the Giant Killer
Maybe it was foolish to expect Bryan Singer to do something cool and interesting with the old Jack and the Beanstalk fairy tale, but this one just fell flat.

Director Guillermo del Toro really dropped the ball on Pacific Rim — a movie that promised so much and delivered so little. CONTRIBUTED

We asked and you let us know that Gravity was your top movie pick for 2013. CONTRIBUTED

Metro's favourites

1. Gravity
2. Blue Jasmine
3. 12 Years A Slave
4. Hunger Games
5. Dallas Buyers Club

Oldboy
Spike Lee's plodding, uninspired remake of Park Chan-wook's 2003 cult classic at least makes a strong case for renting the original. Some things don't translate well, apparently.

Lovelace
A lot of foreplay that led to not very much of anything else, this exploration of the woman behind Deep Throat held too much back.

Metro pick

American Hustle

IN FOCUS
Richard Crouse
scene@metronews.ca

American Hustle's story of flim flam men and women, the FBI and a real life sting known as Abscam has emerged as my favourite movie of 2013. It's an entertainingly audacious movie that will doubtless be compared to The Wolf of Wall Street because of the similarity in tone and themes. The difference is that this time around director David O. Russell has almost out-Scorsese'd Martin Scorsese. Add to that some unexpected and compelling performances from the a-list ensemble cast that included Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner, Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence — and it adds up to the most fun I had at the movies this year.

The Fifth Estate
Maybe it was too soon to explore the rise and fall of WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange, but it seemed perfectly reasonable that Bill Condon and Benedict Cumberbatch were up to the task. Apparently not.

Anchorman 2
Following up an iconic comedy is tough, but we're still not sure what Adam McKay and Will Ferrell were thinking with most of the choices here. Lesson learned: A little bit of Steve Carell's Brick Tamland goes a long way. Also, the film's jokes about racism and sexism actually just play as racist and sexist. Maybe next time, guys?

Readers' pick

Your must-see movie of 2013? Gravity — hands down.

Enough Said
James Gandolfini's last leading film role, Julia Louis-Dreyfus' return to movies, another chance for Nicole Holofcener to examine adult relationships? This one had so much going for it. Too bad the end result is flat, uninspired and far too pleased with itself.

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Metro's turn-up and tune-out in 2013

No lines blurred in this selection

As a shameless Jay Z super fan, I want to say 2013's top song was Holy Grail featuring Justin Timberlake. But even I can't deny this year belonged to Blurred Lines by Robin Thicke featuring Pharrell Williams and T.I. A simplistic hook and its blend of R&B and pop helped the infectious Blurred Lines hold top spot on charts around the world. It also created its share of controversy (think music video with prancing topless supermodels and Thicke preemptively suing Marvin Gaye's family). Love it or hate it, at some point (maybe in a drunken stupor if you're a certain mayor) you likely caught yourself singing, "OK, now he was close, tried to domesticate ya..." IZABELA SZYDLO, METRO

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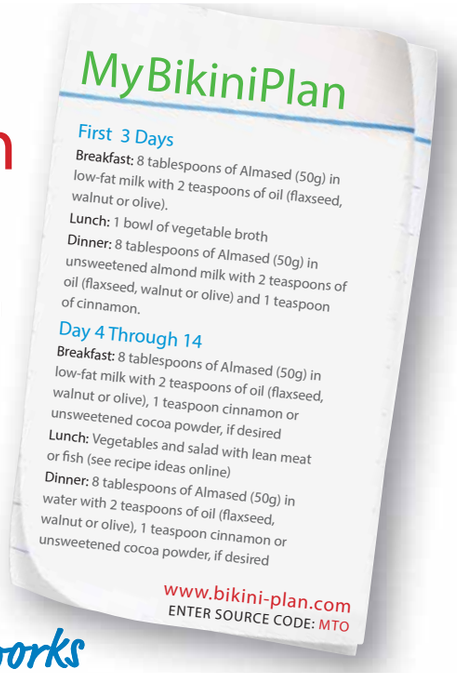
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Metro's picks

Metro's picks for top five songs

- **1.** Get Lucky, by Daft Punk
- **2.** Reflektor and Afterlife, by Arcade Fire
- **3.** Black Skinhead, by Kanye West
- **4.** Royals, by Lorde
- **5.** Thrift Shop, by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis

Metro picks

Song of the Year: Royals by Lorde

SOUND CHECK
Alan Cross
scene@metronews.ca

Talk about a song with universal appeal! What began as a track marketed to the alternative set has become the biggest cross-format hit in years.

This is largely due to what was left out of Royals. It would have been so easy (and tempting!) to mess up the song by over-producing it. Instead, there's an elegant simplicity to everything: an understated rhythm track and the barest hint of a bass line. Lorde's vocals do the rest. The song doesn't even contain a bridge. This is brilliant songwriting, an excellent performance and perfect production, all wrapped in one great song.

Crossover appeal lands Lorde at the top of Alan Cross's list. HANDOUT

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HBO's Game owns the Throne

TV. Whether you binge watched or faithfully tuned in, there were a number of great shows this year. Metro weighs in on what was tube-worthy in 2013

The shocking Red Wedding episode of Game of Thrones made Metro's list of the best of 2013. HANDOUT

Metro's picks

1. Breaking Bad comes to an end
2. Toronto Mayor Rob Ford is lampooned on every major late night talk show and Saturday Night Live
3. The murder-filled Red Wedding episode of Game of Thrones shocks viewers not familiar with the book series.
4. Arrested Development returns to TV via Netflix
5. Netflix series House of Cards becomes the first web TV show to receive major Primetime Emmy Award nominations, and goes on to win in three categories.

Alexandra Cavallo, our TV correspondent from south of the border, gives us her picks for the best shows on TV, however you may watch TV.

Game of Thrones
Game of Thrones had the best season ever. What other show has the balls to ruthlessly — and awesomely, creatively and bloodily — kill off multiple main characters like it ain't no thing? Game of Thrones reigns supreme. See what I did there?

House of Cards
Other than HBO (and FX and A&E and — well, damn, seems like television is killing it lately, huh?) Netflix is putting out some of the most exciting and game-changing programs. House of Cards — to put it simply — is utterly captivating, and this comes from a person, who, I admit it, doesn't even vote. Politics is not my thing. But this show has it all: intrigue, sex, violence, scandal and Kevin Spacey. Enough said.

Project Runway
Here's my shout-out to reality TV. I love reality it. I watch it all. Housewives, teen moms, geriatric moms, people who have sex with inanimate objects — I'll watch them all, as long as it's "real." But Project Runway (technically a reality competition show, which makes it higher brow) is legitimately a quality show. The contestants (for the most part) are actually astoundingly talented, the challenges are fresh and exciting, and there's still enough cat fighting and drama to sate my appetite for lowbrow reality crap.

Girls
How did nobody else even mention this show? I don't care what anybody says, Lena Dunham is a genius and remarkably likeable despite airing her flaws — both emotional and physical — for the whole world to gawk at. Sure, the second season didn't quite meet the very high bar that the debut season set — it was a little too dark, and sometimes depressing — but as a 20-something girl myself (29 still counts) I can totally relate to almost everything that is said and done on this show. Don't judge me.

Nathan For You
Most people have probably never seen or even heard of this show. Get familiar, people, because Canadian comedian Nathan Fielder is one of the funniest dudes on the tube right now. This docu-reality comedy series basically features Fielder playing a deadpan, dead-eyed version of himself, using his "business background" to help out failing companies and individuals. Spoiler alert: He is not helpful.

Trust me, you've got to watch it.

ALEXANDRA CAVALLO/MWN

Top headlines of Hollywood's 2013

They did what? It was a shock-and-awe year in celeb gossip, and Metro's editors never hesitated to chime in on the tabloid chatter

Love them or hate them, it was hard to get off the blinged-out, baby-making bus that was Kimye this year. GETTY IMAGES

Pop culture gets a bad rap, according to Metro's gossip editor, Dorothy Robinson. Sure, it's lowbrow (especially when Miley Cyrus decides to take her clothes off with no deference to taste or talent) and it births fame-hungry monsters (Kimye, you are a creation even Walter Winchell couldn't dream up). Yet, the hijinks and disasters of people who fly so very high take us away from the humdrum of everyday life.

Keeping up with Miley is a nice distraction from the fact that the cable bill is due. Watching Beyonce at the Super Bowl is a reminder of what is humanly possible if you have drive, talent and a whole lot of luck. And witnessing the untimely deaths of two stars reminds us that even our little lives are ones worth living. In fact, maybe we're the lucky ones, blessed to be outside looking in — instead of the other way around.

Here is what some of our editors had to say about the year in gossip:

"I didn't put the Royal Baby on my list because I thought that fell under news. Come on: Kate Middleton should NEVER be on the same list as Miley or Kim Kardashian. And although Avril Lavigne marrying Chad Kroeger wasn't earth-shaking, it was so delightfully weird that I thought it deserved a mention."
DOROTHY ROBINSON

Who wasn't confused by this Canadian coupling? GETTY IMAGES

Metro's picks

1. Miley Cyrus ditches her clean-cut image by twerking at the MTV awards, smoking a joint on air at the MTV Europe Awards, and working with photographer Terry Richards — and those are just some of her antics.
2. Amanda Bynes — see Liz Beddall's story to your right.
3. Kanye West and Kim Kardashian brought forth a baby and decided it would be fun to name her North.
4. Justin Bieber wreaked havoc in his neighbourhood with his driving, peed in a bucket, lost his monkey, and then had a drama-filled South American tour before heading to Australia for more of the same.
5. Angelina Jolie surprised the world by announcing she underwent a double mastectomy.

"I, for one, definitely had Beyonce winning the Super Bowl on my list. Nothing can stop her, not even a blackout. I don't even remember who actually played. All I remember is the Destiny's Child reunion and Beyonce's black lace body suit. She wins." **EMILY LAURENCE**

"I can't find any evidence supporting the theory that Kanye has a sense of humor; I fear he is gravely serious. We mere mortals just do not understand him."
T. MICHELLE MURPHY

I guess unlike other calculated 'Look at me! I'm no longer a Disney pop princess! I'm now a woman!' coming-out moments (see: Britney in the red pleather body suit; Christina's suggestive Genie in a Bottle), Miley's coming out seems raw and unpolished. She's going more for shock value than sex appeal. Which, honestly, is slightly refreshing. Just put the tongue away, girlfriend."
DOROTHY ROBINSON

Amanda on our minds

Reading between the Bynes

While it seems 2013 was the year of the squeaky-clean-songtress-turned-train-wreck-tabloid-queen, there was arguably no one who was featured as consistently on Metro's Dish page as former WB sweetheart Amanda Bynes.

Multiple brushes with the law, airborn bongs, driveway fires, neon wigs and one trainwreck of a Twitter feed meant that Bynes all too often became our feature focus.

Having recently received treatment for mental illness, we hope 2014 brings Amanda some peace, health and much-needed time away from the tabloids.
LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

Amanda Bynes GETTY IMAGES

Dorothy Robinson's picks

1. Miley Cyrus' crazy year.
2. The evolution of Kimye (and the birth of baby North West).
3. Beyoncé wins the Super Bowl.
4. Cory Monteith overdosing.
5. Avril Lavigne marrying Chad Kroeger.

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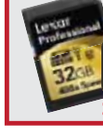
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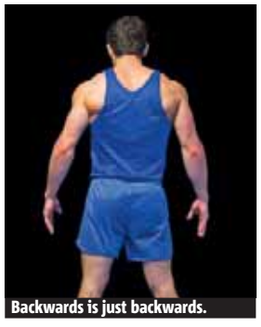
The five fitness trends that we hope don't return — ever

Gonna make you sweat. Waking up your workout keeps you motivated. But these fitness trends seriously miss the mark.

VAWN HIMMELSBACH
life@metronews.ca

It's not a bad idea to switch up your workout routine every now and then to challenge your muscles and stay motivated. But in the quest for new ways to do old exercises, some trends might be a tad questionable.


Backwards is just backwards.

Backwards running

Sure, running can get monotonous, but is running backwards the answer? There's a reason why people are doing it: According to a study by the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, running backwards uses 30 per cent more energy than moving forward at the same speed. And, supposedly, it's easier on your knees. But let's face it; running backwards is an accident waiting to happen since — if it's not obvious — you can't see where you're going. Not to mention it looks ridiculous.

There is nothing wrong with weightlifting. But weightlifting in the heat doesn't make sense. ALL IMAGES ISTOCK PHOTOS

Boutique/hybrid yoga

If you're into yoga, there are a variety of styles to suit your personality, from ashtanga to moksha to yin. But now, you can mix those warrior poses with … hula-hoops, trampolines and martial-arts kicks. Or do yoga on a paddleboard, to disco music or even with your dog (doga). But yoga isn't about total body sculpting or getting a cardio workout — it's about quieting your mind. And it's hard to quiet your mind while doing disco moves in tree posture.

Extreme HIIT … for average Joes

High-intensity interval training (or HIIT) has many benefits: Bursts of vigorous exercise (think squats and burpees) followed by brief rest periods can burn calories — fast. That's why we've seen the rise of workouts like CrossFit, and the Insanity and P90X DVD series.

Run from this trend.

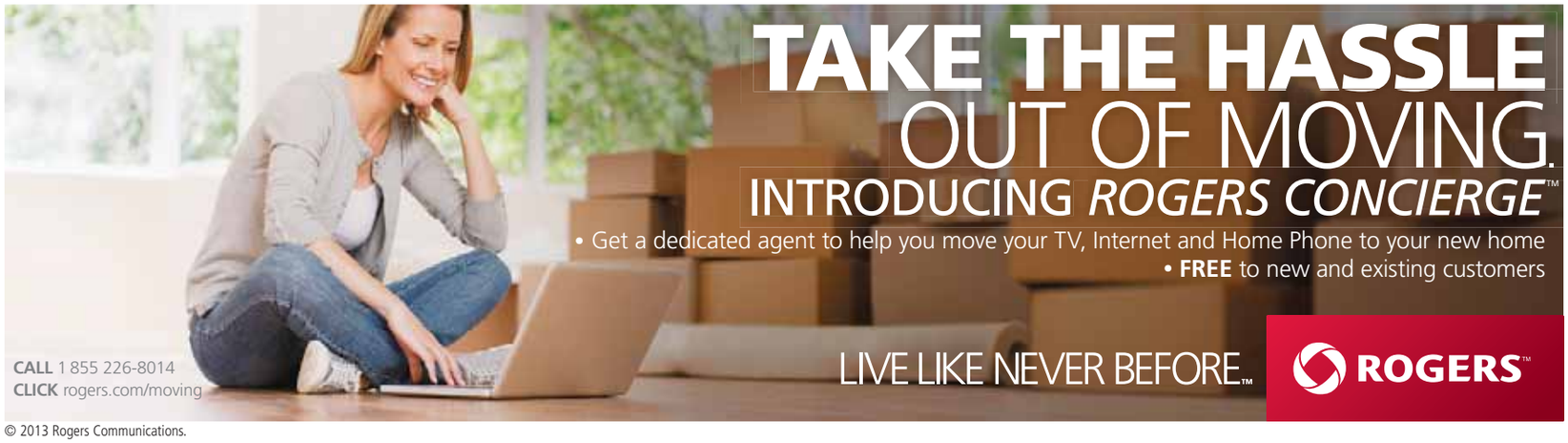
But along with the increase in popularity of these types of workouts has come an increase in injury, from slipped disks to torn rotator cuffs. According to a recent study published by The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 16 per cent of CrossFit participants quit the program due to overuse or injury. At least it's good news for orthopedic surgeons.

Themed runs (that involve barbed wire)

Working out should be fun, and hey, who wouldn't be motivated to run faster when being chased by zombies? While themed workouts from Tough Mudder to colour runs (running through clouds of coloured cornstarch) can be motivating or push you to challenge your endurance, any athletic endeavor that involves wading through ice water under barbed wire or being zapped by live wires is questionable. Perhaps next we'll start seeing live wires attached to treadmills so you'll get zapped if you're not running fast enough.

Hot weightlifting

Traditional weightlifting remains one of the best ways to build muscle. But one of the latest fads takes weightlifting to a new level — pumping iron in the heat. The concept behind Bikram yoga (where the temperature in the room is cranked to 40.6 C with a humidity of 40 per cent) is now being applied to everything from barre to spinning and weightlifting classes. But according to a recent study by the American Council on Exercise, turning up the heat doesn't actually burn extra calories. You just think you are, all the while risking dehydration and even heat stroke. If you like the heat, best to stick to Bikram.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I'll take a cold cerveza with that

Year of Mexican food. You've been fooled long enough with cheesy dishes and store-bought salsa. Authentic Mexican is taking over — olé!

NUTRI-BITES
Theresa Albert
DHN, RNCP
myfriendinfood.com

Mexican has gone beyond the smothered-in-cheese dishes. ISTOCK

Remember when Mexican food meant cookie cutter platters of oddly coloured white rice with a bunch of stuff covered in cheese?

You may have gotten a bowl of pre-fab corn chips and bottled salsa instead of bread as an appetizer.

Luckily, 2013 saw the rise of true Mexican food. It showed up everywhere, from the very hip food truck culture running away with the foodie heart to the top end of just about every urban menu.

Some of the foods that we can't get enough include pulled pork, fish tacos and burritos. And you really haven't lived unless you've found churros with the caramel-like dulce de leche sauce. (Don't forget the side of tequila, which was the beverage of 2013.)

Real Mexican food is wholesome, and it varies across the country from fish-based seaside to tropical fruit interiors, but they all have three things in common: corn, chili peppers and beans. The Europeans added pork, chicken and tomatoes and North Americans topped it all off with some flair.

Taco night is no longer spice from a box mixed with ground beef and corn shells, although, they are certainly retro-welcome. Think broader.

Chicken

Toss a chicken in the slow cooker with one of the many creative jars of salsa on the market and cook all day. Pull chicken from the bones and serve with tostadas, artisan corn and wheat tortillas plus toppings like frozen corn simply roasted on a cookie sheet in the oven.

Cole Slaw

Think about a grated cole slaw mix instead of shredded lettuce. Top with cocoa nibs, any manner of chopped chilies and any combo of fresh herbs. Serve with fresh lime juice and soda water with muddled mint (go ahead add some tequila!)

Pulled Pork

Pulled pork couldn't be easier. The low and slow oven versions create the best melt in your mouth recipes. Sauce options run the gamut from barbecue sauce to the chocolate and chili based mole sauce. This one pot wonder is the best crowd pleaser to come out of this Mexican trend. Pork shoulder or arm is an affordable (if fatty) cut that can't be ruined as long as you keep the oven temperature below 300 and the time at least an hour per pound.

Churro Dip

Since churros are hard to find, must be fresh and deep frying is a pain (not to mention crazy unhealthy!)

Why not go with the classic churro dip: dulce de leche and forgo the donut? This sweet milk caramel sauce can be now purchased jarred but the quickie cheater recipe using only sweetened, condensed milk is ridiculously easy. Use it to drizzle onto vanilla pudding, fresh fruit or chocolate cookies and you are right on the Mexican trend. Which will, by the way, continue for a few more years... **THERESA ALBERT IS A FOOD COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST AND TORONTO PERSONAL NUTRITIONIST. SHE IS @THERESAALBERT ON TWITTER AND FOUND DAILY AT WWW.MYFRIENDINFOOD.COM**

Wine of the Year

2011 Vintage Port

LIQUID ASSETS
Peter Rockwell
@therealwineguy
liquidassets@eastlink.ca

"I'm loading up on 2011 Vintage Port," says Peter Rockwell, Metro's expert for all things liquid. "Considered one of the best years in decades; all the big houses released a version this year. Dow's 2011 ($79.49) is spectacular; and will age well into 2063."

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Sports Leafs flame out in spectacular fashion; Jays do the same; Raptors are the Raptors. It was another trying year for our Toronto teams.

Year shows Leafs not nearly ready to contend

THE HOCKEY NEWS
Adam Proteau
toronto@metronews.ca

Cody Franson and Phil Kessel have proven valuable assets but they'll need considerably more help to make the Leafs contenders. JARED WICKERHAM/GETTY IMAGES

The Toronto Maple Leafs began 2013 on a high note — hey, after the NHL lockout ended in mid-January, all the league's teams did — but are closing out the calendar year hitting so many low notes, you may as well call them the boys in Blue & (Barry) White.

Now, let's not get ahead of ourselves. When the league returned to action, the Leafs' first "full" season under head coach Randy Carlyle had a lot of positives. Not only did Toronto make its first post-season appearance since 2004, it finished two wins and one overtime loss away from home-ice advantage. Young forwards Nazem Kadri and James van Riemsdyk proved valuable additions to a young roster that included already-very-valuable star Phil Kessel. The tandem of James Reimer and Ben Scrivens did stellar work in the 48-game regular season before Reimer took over for the Leafs' first-round series against Boston.

From there, Buds fans experienced their first major disaster of the year. Sure, Kessel asserted himself against his former Bruins teammates as never before; and, sure, Toronto pushed Boston as hard as any team the eventual Eastern Conference champions faced before the final.

But something happened that pushed those positives to the far back of Toronto's collective mind. Something called Game 7. Something involving a 4-1 Leafs lead with 11 minutes remaining in the third period, and a collapse that will haunt the dreams of their fans for years.

The sombre mood in Toronto changed when the 2013-14 campaign began and the Leafs — strengthened in goal by the acquisition of Jonathan Bernier — jumped out to a 10-4-0 record in the first month of the year. But since the injury bug took a bite out of the roster (in particular, knocking out centre David Bolland with a severed tendon in his left ankle), they've been in a free fall and head into the end of December closer to the periphery of the playoffs than the top of their division.

As has been noted in this space before, it's almost always a mistake to think the Leafs are as good or as bad as they appear at any particular moment. The lack of consistency through the lineup is troubling, but there's still a significant amount of talent here.

As 2014 looms, that mixed bag type of result is likely to continue. The Leafs are a franchise not near the end of a long-term rebuild and as 2013 showed, the foundation still needs some work.

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Toronto's top sports stories of the year

The past year produced lots of hometown highs and lows, but these five topped our list.

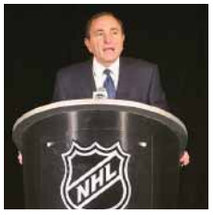
THE CANADIAN PRESS

1 The end of the NHL lockout

Hockey fans rejoiced when the NHL and the NHL Players' Association reached a tentative deal to end the lockout in the early hours of Jan. 6.

The agreement was ratified by the board of governors three days later.

Just over five months later, the Chicago Blackhawks won their second Stanley Cup in four years.



NHL commissioner Gary Bettman apologized following the lockout. GETTY IMAGES

2 A season of disappointment

The Toronto Blue Jays came into 2013 as World Series favourites after a blockbuster off-season that included a 12-player megadeal with the Florida Marlins and the acquisition of reigning National League Cy Young winner R.A. Dickey.

But with the city buzzing at the thought of meaningful September baseball for the first time since the team's championship years in 1992 and 1993, the campaign was bust from the start.

Brett Lawrie TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

3 Raonic's rise

Tennis star Milos Raonic became the first Canadian to crack the ATP top-10 list.

The Thornhill player made the Rogers Cup final in Montreal and was also instrumental in leading Canada to the Davis Cup semifinals.

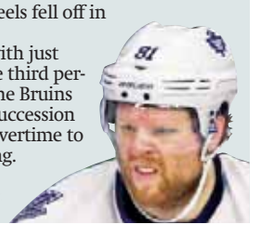
Also making big gains on the court in 2013 were Vancouver's Vasek Pospisil and Montreal's Eugenie Bouchard, who both shot up the rankings.

Milos Raonic GETTY IMAGES

4 Leafs collapse in epic fashion

The Toronto Maple Leafs made the playoffs for the first time since 2004 and looked set to advance to the second round when the wheels fell off in spectacular fashion.

Toronto led Boston 4-1 with just over 11 minutes to go in the third period of Game 7, only to see the Bruins score three times in quick succession in regulation and again in overtime to send the Maple Leafs packing.



Phil Kessel TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

5 Canadian hoops history

Anthony Bennett shocked many observers on June 27 when he became the first-ever Canadian to go No. 1 at the NBA draft, selected by the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"I'm just as surprised as everybody else," the Brampton native said.

Meanwhile, Vaughan's Andrew Wiggins was named the top high school player in the U.S.

Anthony Bennett is greeted by NBA commissioner David Stern upon being drafted. GETTY IMAGES

Usage-based insurance in Canada?
What the Beep!
Select Canadian insurers have started offering usage-based car insurance on an optional basis. This option, while still new, may be a cost-effective solution for some drivers.
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Answer to end Jays' drought? It's Pat!

Rickey Henderson, left, and Joe Carter celebrate the Jays' World Series win on Oct. 23, 1993. GETTY IMAGES FILE

DAVE LANGFORD
dave.langford@metronews.ca

There is a wonderful piece of trivia surrounding legendary Blue Jays general manager Pat Gillick, and it goes like this.

Gillick, after leading the Blue Jays to two World Series titles (1992, '93) and five division titles (1985, '89, '91, '92, '93), left the team in 1994.

The Jays have not made the playoffs since.

In 1995, Gillick joined Baltimore as general manager and the Orioles made the playoffs in 1996 and '97. He left the team after three years.

The Orioles then went on a streak of 14 losing seasons before making the playoffs in 2012.

Next, Gillick took his genius to Seattle, where the Mariners made the playoffs in 2000 and 2001, the only time in their history they made it in back-to-back seasons.

He left the team in 2003. And yes, the Mariners have not made the playoffs since.

His next stop was Philadelphia where, as GM, he led the Phillies to his third World Series championship.

The three teams Gillick left behind have a total of one playoff appearance in 44 seasons.

And with the Jays currently promoting Flashback Fridays, they need to bring back the most important person in their 36-year history — Gillick.

God knows they've tried everything else.

The much-hyped 2013 was a disaster in every way. It started with Opening Day and never let up.

April 2 was the day a truly horrendous fielding catcher talked manager John Gibbons into letting him catch a Cy Young-winning knuckleball pitcher the Jays acquired in the off-season.

Before a crowd of 48,847 at the Rogers Centre, catcher J.P. Arencibia had three passed balls — should have been four but a wonky scorer decision saved him — and the Blue Jays, with R.A. Dickey on the mound, lost 4-1 to Cleveland.

Arencibia never caught Dickey again and batted .194 on the season in which he was allowed to have 474 at bats.

Yes, there were pitching challenges and injuries all season long.

But the tedious season in which the Jays finished last in the AL East was essentially lost that day in April.

And now the only way to turn the franchise around is to bring back the Blue Jay legend, Pat Gillick. Even at age 76.

The Jays' leaders in 2013

Wins: R.A. Dickey, 14
Strikeouts: R.A. Dickey, 177
Saves: Casey Janssen, 34
Batting average: Adam Lind, .288
Homers: Edwin Encarnacion, 36
RBIs: Encarnacion, 104
Hits: Encarnacion, 144

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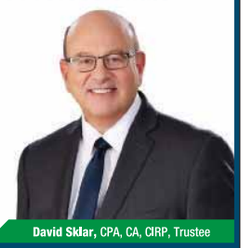

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Horoscopes

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
You are on the threshold of a spectacular breakthrough. Which only goes to show that when you focus on a goal and follow up on it consistently, you can be a success. But don't get too full of yourself.

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
You need a change of direction and the planets will see that you get it. But don't worry. You will like what the next few weeks bring your way very much indeed.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
You are who you are for a reason. If you stop wasting time fantasizing about who you would like to be and focus on doing a better job of who you are, you will soon be both successful and happy.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
Your problems are not as bad as you think, so quit worrying. Cosmic activity in your opposite sign of Capricorn will bring relationship matters to a head over the weeks, but there is no need to panic. You'll survive.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
You may be tempted to change something that has worked for years, but is that a good idea? There is every possibility that you will go too far and change things in a revolutionary rather than an evolutionary way.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Play to your strengths and don't let what others are doing affect you in any way. There are some things you do better than most and those are the things you should be focusing on.

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
If you have been taking a loved one for granted, this could be a tricky day. Somehow you need to convince them that your feelings are still the same but it will take more than just words.

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Something important is about to happen and chances are you will enjoy it. Most likely it will have something to do with your social life, so get out into the world and smile big!

♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
You may come into money over the next few days but it would be wrong to count on it to get you out of trouble. The only way you are going to improve your financial situation is to cut back on your commitments.

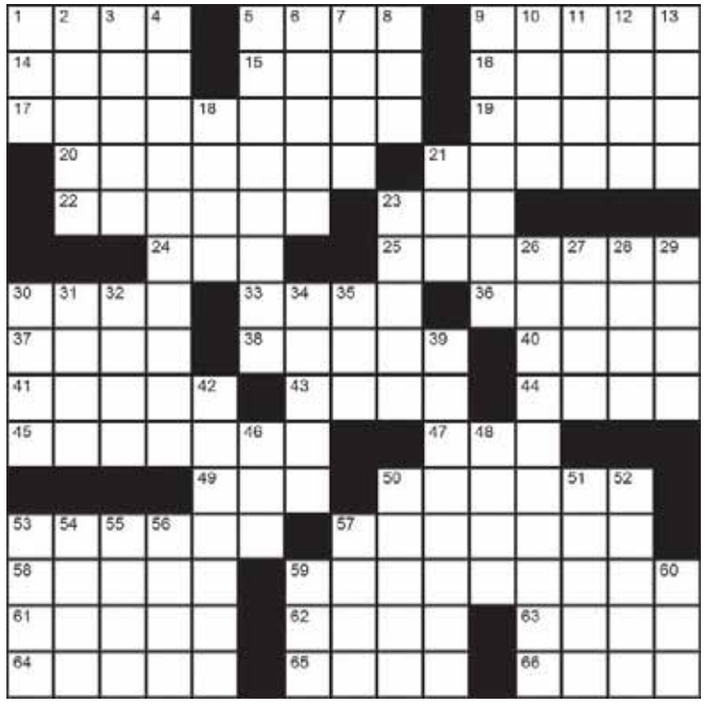
♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
As cosmic activity in your sign reaches a peak over the new year period, you'll have to deal with situations that in the past you've tried to avoid. The good news is solutions can be found, but you've got to act now.

♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
If your present approach to a problem is not working then clearly you need to tackle it from a different angle. Some people say you're too inflexible, too set in your ways to change. Prove them wrong.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
Pay attention to what loved ones tell you over the next 24 hours because they can see something that you missed. If you listen to what they say and act on their advice, it could save you trouble. SALLY BROMPTON

Crossword: Canada Across and Down

See today's answers at metronews.ca/answers.
BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



Across
1. Pasta, e.g.
5. 17th Greek letters
9. Mother-of-pearl
14. __ code
15. Nobleman
16. Once more
17. December 26th significance: 2 wds.
19. Rene of movies
20. Be drifting alone at sea ...but suddenly become joyful!: 2 wds.
21. Slightly adjusts
22. Accompaniment
23. Musical fifth note, variantly
24. Exclaimed "That hurts!", say
25. Shopping: Door-__ special
30. George Michael's '80s group!
33. Architect Mr. Saarinen
36. France's longest river
37. Rush
38. Pilotless aircraft
40. Gift Tag: To and __
41. Nimbi
43. Prince of Wales' motto, Ich __ (I Serve)
44. Dick Tracy's beloved, __ Trueheart
45. '50s TV series about a Quebec family, "La famille __"
47. Best, __-rated
49. Fee-fi-fo-__
50. North or South, in The States
53. Neil Young song: 2 wds.
57. Subscriber's extension
58. Wickerworker's willow
59. Traditional pudding of Newfoundland: 2 wds.
61. Billy Bob Thornton flick, "The Man Who __ There" (2001)
62. 'Myth' suffix
63. National Velvet author Ms. Bagnold
64. Tiffs
65. Foundation
66. Lines of travel, for short

Down
1. Taxi
2. Sprang up
3. T. __ (Some dinosaurs)
4. __-__, Quebec (Former PM Brian Mulroney's birthplace)
5. Viewed as
6. "In case you __ noticed..."
7. Toward the mouth
8. Slick
9. Arctic whale having a spiral tusk
10. Chill
11. House, in Havana
12. Board game
13. Biblical grandson
18. Sugar substitute, Sweet'_ __
21. Maple Leafs, on scoreboards
23. Elegant biscuit
26. Ski slope surface sometimes: 2 wds.
27. Contract
28. God of love in Greek mythology
29. Sleep stages, commonly
30. Gift __
31. Transport stuff
32. Prefix to 'phobia' (Fear of heights)
34. Canadian fashion designer Mr. Moralioglu
35. French queen's mate
39. Mire
42. Attempts
46. Amusing
48. __-dokey
50. Manet painting contemporary
51. Razz
52. 1966 Michael Caine film
53. Awesomenesses!
54. Office request [acronym]
55. Marge's daughter
56. Prince Michael of __ (Queen Elizabeth's cousin)
57 Costa __
59. Taradiddle
60. Hose-using rescue units, for short

Dec. 24th's Crossword

Sudoku

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved.

					5		4	
1	2				6	5		
	5		8			3		
	6			3	8		5	
9								7
	8		4	7			6	
		2			9		3	
		6	7				1	8
	3		2					

Dec. 24's Sudoku

3	9	1	7	8	4	2	6	5
8	2	7	5	3	6	4	1	9
5	6	4	2	9	1	3	8	7
1	7	5	3	6	2	9	4	8
6	8	9	1	4	7	5	2	3
4	3	2	9	5	8	1	7	6
2	5	8	4	7	9	6	3	1
7	1	3	6	2	5	8	9	4
9	4	6	8	1	3	7	5	2

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Forte SX shown

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CITY (M/T): 8.0L/100KM

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KIA
The Power to Surprise

Offer(s) available on select new 2013/2014 models through participating dealers to qualified retail customers who take delivery by January 2, 2014. Dealers may sell or lease for less. Some conditions apply. See dealer for complete details. Vehicles shown may include optional accessories and upgrades available at extra cost. All offers are subject to change without notice. All pricing includes delivery and destination fees up to $1,665, $34 tire recycling/filter charges, $5 OMVIC fee, environmental fee, variable dealer administration fees (up to $399) and $100 A/C charge (where applicable) and excludes licensing, registration, insurance, other taxes and down payment (if applicable and unless otherwise specified). Other lease and financing options also available. **0% purchase financing is available on select new 2013/2014 Kia models O.A.C. Terms vary by model and trim, see dealer for complete details. ***"Don't Pay Until Spring" offer (150-day payment deferral) applies to purchase financing on select new 2014 models. No interest will accrue during the first 120 days of the finance contract. After this period, interest accrues and the purchaser will repay both the principal and interest monthly over the contract's term. ◊Up to $750 customer bonus is available on 2014 Cadenza ($750), 2013/2014 Rio/485 door ($200), 2013/2014 Soul ($250), 2014 Forte ($250), 2013/2014 Optima/Optima Hybrid ($300), 2013/2014 Sportage ($300), 2014 Sorento ($375), 2014 Rondo ($300), 2014 Sedona ($400). Savings cannot be combined with Don't Pay Until Spring offer. Offer only available on finance terms, not cash or lease offers. ≠Bi-weekly finance payment O.A.C. for new 2014 Sorento 2.4L LX AT FWD (SR75BE)/2014 Forte LX MT (F054IE) based on a selling price of $28,893/17,913 is $159/$98 with an APR of 0% for 60/84 months, amortized over an 84-month period. Estimated remaining principal balance of $8,255/$0 plus applicable taxes due at end of 60-month period. Retailer may sell for less. See dealer for full details. ‡Cash purchase price for the new 2014 Rondo LX MT (RN55IE) is $19,893 and includes a cash savings of $4,000 (which is deducted from the negotiated selling price before taxes and cannot be combined with special lease and finance offers). Retailer may sell for less. ‡$4,000 cash savings on the cash purchase of an eligible new 2014 Rondo LX MT (RN55IE) from a participating dealer between December 3, 2013-January 2, 2014, is deducted from the selling price before taxes and cannot be combined with special lease and finance offers including the "Don't Pay Until Spring" offer. Some conditions apply. ^NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Phase 1 Entry Period ended November 30, 2013, at the close of regular business hours at participating Kia dealerships. Phase 2 Entry Period ends December 31, 2013, at the close of regular business hours at participating Kia dealerships. Open to age-of-majority residents of Canada. 60 Prizes (30 attributed to Phase 1 and 30 attributed to Phase 2), each consisting of a cheque that may range in value from $15,350 to $46,859. Odds of winning a Phase 1 Prize depend on the number of eligible Phase 1 Entries received before the applicable Phase 1 Draw Date. Odds of winning a Phase 2 Prize depend on the number of eligible Phase 2 Entries received before the applicable Phase 2 Draw Date. Skill-testing question required. For full contest rules and no-purchase entry details, visit www.kia.ca. ^Model shown Manufacturer Suggested Retail Price for 2014 Sorento 3.3L EX AT AWD (SR75HE)/2014 Forte SX (F074BE)/2014 Rondo EX Luxury (RN75GE) is $34,195/$26,195/$32,195. ^Highway/city fuel consumption is based on the 2014 Sorento LX 2.4L GDI 4-cyl (A/T)/2014 Forte 1.8L MPI 4-cyl (M/T)/2014 Rondo 2.0L GDI 4-cyl (M/T). These updated estimates are based on the Government of Canada's approved criteria and testing methods. Refer to the *EnerGuide Fuel Consumption Guide*. Your actual fuel consumption will vary based on driving habits and other factors. Information in this advertisement is believed to be accurate at the time of printing. For more information on our 5-year warranty coverage, visit kia.ca or call us at 1-877-542-2886. Kia is a trademark of Kia Motors Corporation.